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and removed the key. He examined the key closely before dropping it in his pocket.

"Just the same," he said, "this door's worth guarding. The cop doesn't seem to be finding much out there. Suppose you run through the dressing-rooms and the lofts, Quaile. Maybe I'd better do it myself. You stay by this door."

IT was obvious that the manager wished Barbara kept under observation as much as the door. Quaile nodded. McHugh took a handful of matches from his pocket and climbed the iron staircase.

Barbara's face had lost its vivacity. With a troubled frown she watched the man go.

"He makes me feel that I'm in the way. Why? Do you know?"

Quaile wanted to throw reserve to the winds. It seemed only fair to tell her of McHugh's suspicions. He forced a laugh. "The riddles of the sphinx are simple compared with a manager's whims."

"I suppose I'm a fool to stay," she said. All at once she seemed to grow very tired. He brought a chair. She sat down, sighing.

"Thanks. I'm stubborn enough to wait. I do want to see what they'll find. It's all so queer."

She rested, half closing her eyes. For a long time they waited without words, listening to McHugh and the policeman as they prowled about, constantly on the alert for an alarm.

At last the two searchers met on the stage, and with puzzled faces descended to the cellar.

"They've found nothing yet," Barbara said.

Quaile clenched his hands. "Then they will. Surely down there—" But McHugh and the policeman returned empty-handed.

"But I heard a groan after I had fired," Quaile insisted.

"There's no blood," McHugh answered. "Every door's locked. We've been in every rat-hole."

"Except the passage," Quaile reminded him.

He went forward and glanced through. McHugh peered over his shoulder.

"Where did you stand when you fired?" he asked.

Quaile entered, and at a distance of several feet faced the manager. In the narrow space the acrid odor of the powder still lingered.

"And where was your figure?" McHugh went on.

"A little in front of where you're standing. Just inside."

McHugh turned and hurried to the rear of the stage, where he supplemented the vague light with matches.

"Come here, Quaile," he snapped. Quaile walked over, the policeman at his heels.

"No dream about that," McHugh said. He indicated a groove in one of the iron steps, then led them to the brick wall, which in one place had been newly flaked.

"Your bullet's there," he announced. He thrust his finger into a small orifice. "I can feel it."

Quaile moved uneasily.

"Then it wasn't a man in front of me. He would surely have been hit."

BARBARA had watched and listened restlessly. McHugh glanced at her. Quaile knew the manager wouldn't catechize him as to the details of his experience in the girl's presence.

"Suppose you'll have to see her home," McHugh said under his breath. "So come to the office the first thing in the morning. I want every little thing that happened while you were alone."

He raised his voice.

"I'm stumped, Quaile. Who looked that door? Who raised that curtain? Not here now, anyway. So we might as well all go home and sleep on it. Better pick up that lamp of yours."

Quaile vaulted the footlights and walked up the aisle to the seat where he had waited for the thing that limped. The cover was pushed back, as he had

left it. The flashlight, too, was where he had remembered hearing it roll beneath the seats.

As he arose he pressed the control perfunctorily. He braced himself heavily against the seat. A brilliant path of light tore across the auditorium to the farther wall. He snapped it off. The shadows jeered at him.

"McHugh!" he shouted.

The manager sprang from the wings, scrambled over the footlights, and ran along the aisle.

"What's up now, Quaile?"

Quaile saw Barbara step on the stage and look anxiously in his direction. He held up the cylinder.

"This," he said. "I told you when the limping thing went by it wouldn't work. Just now, when I picked it up—look!"

He pressed the control. The light glared. McHugh snatched the cylinder from his hand.

"You found it exactly where you dropped it?"

"Yes."

"Then you were too excited. You couldn't have worked it right."

"Don't think that, McHugh. You can't do any more than snap the button back as far as it will go. I did that time and again."

"This is the strangest thing yet," McHugh mused. "I'm glad you came, anyway, Quaile. You've given me a lot to think about."

"Can we go now?" Barbara asked, as they climbed to the stage.

"In a hurry?" McHugh wanted to know.

She shivered. "It's cold here. I—I'm afraid. I want to go."

"All right. You and Quaile open the stage door while I put out the lights. Here's the key."

Quaile took the key and led Barbara to the iron door.

"It can be dark in here," McHugh said, with an uncomfortable laugh. "Got me guessing. No one's gone out, so no one could have been here."

As if in defiant contradiction, through the darkness behind them came the sound of limping footsteps.

For a fleeting moment Barbara shrank against Quaile.

McHugh stiffened.

"Good God! You hear that?"

CLOSE beside them Quaile caught a gentle padding. From out the pit-like night of the theater a tiny lean black body glided past him, slipped into the alley, and, before he could touch it,—before he could convince himself that it had actually been there,—had slunk from sight close to the wall. At the same moment the limping footsteps ceased.

Barbara faltered into the alley. Quaile and McHugh followed. While the manager slammed the door and turned the key, Quaile ran up the alley as far as the fence. He found no sign of a cat. He came back, speaking with reluctance. His eyes had had no chance to accustom themselves to the new darkness. The thing had been so rapid, so unexpected. He wasn't confident that the others had seen what he had.

"I thought I saw—" he began.

McHugh nodded.

"Then I did, but it went by so quick."

"A shadow," Barbara whispered. "Can't we go? I want to get away from this place."

Quaile realized the futility of entering again the building which he had twice assured himself was empty, yet which had just given them fresh proof of habitation, mysterious and not to be accounted for.

"We can't do anything more to-night," McHugh agreed, and led them to the sidewalk.

He turned from an unseeing stare at the arc light on the corner to Barbara. His manner toward her, which had been harsh and contemptuous, altered. He attempted a rough kindness.

"You look sort of sick, Barbara. Remember, you're a nervy girl. If old Woodford is walking around inside, he's got nothing against you. Don't you

worry. And, until we find out what went on in there to-night, you keep your mouth shut. Don't you let any of it get to Wilkins."

Her answer conveyed a reproach: "You can trust me, Mr. McHugh."

"That's all right," he said. "Now run along home. Quaile will see that nothing troubles you."

She had controlled herself. She followed Quaile silently across the street and entered a cab. When he was seated beside her, the girl's attitude urged on him an increasing sympathy.

"You are nervy," he said softly. "Most women would have screamed—made a scene."

Her hand moved, but she didn't answer. For most of the ride, in fact, she remained withdrawn in her corner. He fancied that a more profound emotion than fright held her so. He became a trifle ashamed of that unguarded moment in the alley. In a sense, he was glad when the cab drew up in a quiet side street before a big apartment-house. He helped her to the sidewalk, and followed her to the door, glancing up at the façade of the apartment-house—a new building, evidently expensive.

"This is where you live?"

She nodded.

"I wonder," he went on hesitatingly, "if sometime I might—"

"When things are a little more settled," she interrupted. "Perhaps after the opening. I'd like you to come to tea."

"You make it too remote," he objected. "So much has happened to throw the opening into doubt."

"Then soon, if you wish," she said, and frankly offered her hand.

It was cold and lifeless in his grasp. She drew it away and walked past the waiting hall-boy at the door.

QUAILE returned to the cab, and, as the chauffeur drove him rapidly off, fell into a reverie, discontented, almost morbid. At first his latest memories crowded his mind. He no longer questioned the fact that to-night a new element had entered his life. He was not at all sure it was a welcome one, that its ultimate resolution wouldn't mean unhappiness. For he could not think of Barbara without recalling McHugh's misgivings. They served to remind him, too, that he really knew nothing about the girl except that she was beautiful and possessed of a personality that had always appealed to him. Whom she lived with, what interests her non-professional life centered about, he had no idea. At the first opportunity he would accept that invitation, which he had to all purposes forced from her.

Somewhere there must be an explanation of her moody and undependable actions. He had a sudden fear that the past might harbor it. Carlton's death had changed her. Did that suggest an answer? Could there have been between Barbara and Carlton a sympathy concealed from the rest of the world?

He tried to put her from his mind. He told himself that the reaction from his experience in the theater, the dusk of the alley, the strangeness of her presence there, the anxiety it had suggested for him, had all combined to fill him with a sentimental folly without real foundation, which consequently could not survive. He was glad it had not carried him too far. Nevertheless it worried him that her bearing had forecasted an unfavorable response.

At least, the incident had served for a time, drug-like, to deaden the mental pain of his vigil in the theater. That surged back now with its impossible details, its impotent horror. He entered his apartment with callous indifference. So much had happened in the last few hours that the prospect of the occult bell had ceased, for the moment, to terrify him. Silence, however, pervaded the place.

In his bedroom, he faced a mirror. His hands tightened on the edge of the bureau. The countenance that stared back was gray and marked by unfamiliar lines. The eyes were blood-shot, the lids twitched. Suddenly the face broke into a cynical smile. There had flashed into